



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **FROM SKIRTS TO RIFLES: FEMALE SOLDIERS IN THE ILLINOIS MILITIA, TODAY'S NATIONAL GUARD**

*Story and photos by Army Spc. Lisa Cope, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

**SPRINGFIELD** – The first shots of the Civil War were fired 150 years ago on April 12, 1861. While the Civil War may bring thoughts of brothers-in-arms fighting side by side, it is now thought that many of those “brothers” may have actually been sisters.

Adriana Schroeder of Springfield, the historian for the Illinois National Guard, said it has been discovered that a number of women dressed as men in order to serve as Soldiers in the war.

“There is a lot of evidence, and now historians think, that women who masqueraded as men number in the thousands during the antebellum period, the post-war period in the United States,” said Schroeder.

Aside from a desire to serve their country, these women dressed as men in order to survive financially, said Schroeder.

“The legal, social and economic status; they could earn a comfortable lifestyle as a man,” said Schroeder. “They could have a bank account, they could own property, they could vote; all things that women could not do.”

Pvt. Albert D.J. Cashier of Saunemin enlisted with the 95th Illinois Regiment August 3, 1862 at age 19 in Belvidere. It was not until he was hit by a car in 1911, almost 50 years later, that the doctor setting Cashier’s broken thigh, discovered that Cashier was actually a woman by the name of Jennie Hodgers.

As a Soldier, Cashier frequently went above and beyond the call of duty serving in the 95th, a unit that saw much combat including the battle at Vicksburg.

“There were times when she was known for her gallantry in battle,” said Schroeder. “At the Siege of Vicksburg on May 18, 1863, she was captured at a Confederate outpost ... she had her weapon taken away from her, so she fought the guard. There was a struggle, she captured his weapon. She proceeded to smack

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him in the head with the butt of the rifle, rendering him unconscious and she (escaped)."

With her secret kept she would later become a resident at the Soldiers and Sailor's home in Quincy. After word leaked out that Cashier was a woman, she was committed to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane, now the East Moline Correctional Center in East Moline, because she was thought to be insane for impersonating a man for so many years.

Although many of her former fellow Soldiers petitioned for better treatment for her, and for her to be released, Cashier died in the mental institution of an unspecified infection on October 10, 1915. She was buried in Saunemin's Sunnyslope Cemetery in her Union Army uniform with full military honors.

"To me, her story is one of gusto, inspiration, bravery and tragic heartbreak," said Schroeder. "I say that because she sought personal freedom ... by breaking the boundaries that were set for women at the time and Soldiering was the exact antithesis of Victorian womanhood."

Schroeder said she feels that the women of this era set the precedent for women to have the rights that they enjoy today.

"They weren't expected to do anything but stay at home and ... (perform) basically a caregiver role, since it was the Victorian Age," said Schroeder. "It was the bravado and the gusto of some of these women to buck the system and ... they just proved, they broke the glass ceiling and demonstrated that they could do anything a man can do."

Pfc. Jami Prichard of North Henderson, the Illinois National Guard historian's assistant, said she agrees that the women of the Civil War paved the way for the women of today.

"If it were not for the women taking small steps back then, women wouldn't be where we are today," said Prichard. "If they had not taken those initial steps, I do not think women would be allowed to be in the Army today."

Prichard said even the few women who did not dress as men in the Civil War and were allowed in the camps and to follow the men to war were only responsible for the domestic needs of the Soldiers such as nursing, cooking and laundering.

In addition to performing their jobs of caring for the sick and wounded, preparing meals, laundering, and

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keeping the camp sanitary, these women provided a much needed emotional support system for the men, said Prichard.

Whether in uniform or not women played a huge role in the Civil War, and in turn proved the strength of women and helped to further the fight for women's rights.



**Submitted photo/** Pvt. Albert D.J. Cashier of Saunemin enlisted with the 95th Illinois Regiment August 3, 1862 at age 19 in Belvidere. It was not until he was hit by a car in 1911 that the doctor setting Cashier's broken thigh, discovered that Cashier was actually a woman by the name of Jennie Hodgers.



**Submitted photo/** The grave of Albert D.J. Cashier in Saunemin's Sunnyslope Cemetery. Cashier enlisted with the 95th Illinois Regiment August 3, 1862 at 19 in Belvidere. It was not until he was hit by a car in 1911 that the doctor setting Cashier's broken thigh, discovered that Cashier was actually a woman by the name of Jennie Hodgers.

*For high resolution photos please contact the Illinois National Guard Public Affairs at [ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil](mailto:ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil).*